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ABSTRACT

The American phenomenon of "more is better" extends a value-loaded concept implicit in budget preparation. At any university, the scope, magnitude and cost of a residence hall assistant program selection process is a metaphor to illustrate efficiency and effectiveness of human resources. In order to discover a more efficient and effective selection process, data were collected from 329 student applicants to a Resident Assistant Program. Easily available variables such as term standing, grade point average, and terms lived in a residence hall were compared. Chi Square and T-Test procedures did not reveal any significant differences among the students who were continued or discontinued in the selection process. The outcome "no difference" does however have implications for widely used minimum criteria as a basis for selection. (Author/BMW)

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Efficiency and Effectiveness of a Resident Assistant Selection Process

by

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During any period of constrained resources, it becomes imperative for managers and administrators to become sensitive to the allocation of human as well as financial resources. Frequently, a disproportionate amount of energy is devoted toward the accumulation of funds to either enlarge or maintain present positions at the expense of maximizing the functional use of the human resources already employed. Divisions, departments and colleges eagerly compete for resources while neglecting manpower and talent that might be already available to them. While the American phenonmena of "more is better" extends a value-loaded concept implicit in budget preparation, the critical issue in this discussion points toward the impact of the phenomena, not the cause of it.

This situation is not particularly different for example, in a student affairs office. Perhaps, more careful attention might be paid in this division for it is often those budgets which are very closely scrutinized and more readily cut. At any university, large or small, the scope, magnitude, and cost of a residence hall program selection process is an appropriate metaphor to illustrate the efficient utilization of human resources or lack of them.

Many colleges and universities set minimum criteria for the R.A. position or its counterpart (Murphy, 1964). The rationale or motivation in using such criteria as age, terms spent living in a residence hall and G.P.A. for example, seems to be based upon the "common denominator" theory of college student comparison. Dixon (1970), conducted a survey identifying various R.A. selection procedures in small, private liberal arts colleges. She found that age, class (term standing) and academic achievement were rather common minimum application criteria for the R.A. position in many institutions. In studies done comparing various training programs and selection processes, similar minimum G.P.A. and term standing requirements for application were used (Carrenti and Tuttle, 1972; Spurrier and Collins, 1973). Although it seems to be a frequent practice to employ use such criteria for R.A. application, there is some data available which rejects G.P.A. for example, as a valid standard for application for the position of R.A. (Mullozzi and Spees, 1971; Schroeder and Dowse, 1968).

Since it is the intention of this study to discover a method to streamline a particular selection process rather than predicting specific outcomes of final selection, variables such as age, term standing and G.P.A. were used, only to be enhanced by their availability and comparability.

Each winter term the Division of Residential Life Programs of the Pennsylvania State University (University Park Campus) selects Resident Assistants for the following academic year. The applicants must all be selected by the conclusion of the winter term in order to enroll in a course (Interpersonal Realtions Training for Resident Assistants) required as part of their training during the spring term. Hence, the task of selection is confounded by the short time frame for the professional staff to make their decision.

For the last two years, there have been between 400-500 total individual applicants for the positions. The Director of Residential Life Programs expects, from a student development perspective, a professional staff member to be directly involved in the selection process by requiring each applicant to be seen by a professional staff member in an interview situation. The selection process is decentralized (creating a control of internal validity) characterized by interviews occurring in each of five residence hall areas. The administration of each area is free to develop its own criteria for evaluation and selection. All of the areas do have a three or four phase process by which they slowly narrow down the pool of applicants. It is during this time (Winter Term) that professional staff as well as paraprofessional R.A. staff often complain bitterly about the excessive time that is consumed by the selection process. This situation is amplified with the disproprotionate numbers of applicants with respect to positions available.

The R.A. position is one of the most lucrative part-time employment an undergraduate student can participate in while still being a full-time student. Consequently, there have been many applications for an ever decreasing number of positions. The total number of Resident Assistants employed is 168. The turn-over each year is approximately 40%. The system needs between 65 and 70 R.A.s each year in addition to approximately 10 to 15 alternates. Students with a minimum cumulative grade point average of at least 2.50, who are not on disciplinary probation and are full-time students are eligible to apply for the position. These are minimum requirements dictated by the Office of Residential Life which help create a particularly large applicant pool.

This study is devoted to discovering an equitable, objective and sound method to reduce the R.A. applicant pool. This should provide more time for professional and paraprofessional staffs to pursue their other responsibilities.

Method

During a meeting of the professional staff consensus held that during the first phase of each selection process, in all residence hall areas, approximately 40% of the applicants are in fact discontinued. With this large number in mind, it seemed reasonable to expect that some demographic, objective, and quantifiable variables that might be used at the outset to distinguish those who are accepted to go in the selection process (Group I) from those who are discontinued (Group II). A significant difference in any of these variables might suggest a change in the minimum criteria for application thus reducing the rather intensive work load. The task was one not to change any particular selection process but rather to reduce the volume of total applications. Thus, a more efficient and effective selection process can take place.

Information that was constant and easily available on each subject (applicant) was (1) grade point average (2) number of terms lived in a resident hall and (3) age, and/or number of credits earned and/or term standing.[1]

[1] In order to collect this data the Office of Residential Life required all the applicants in each of the five residence hall areas to attend a general meeting and to complete a questionnaire designed for this purpose.

The entire population of applicants (329) were included in the data analysis rather than selecting a sample of that population. Given that there are five different selection processes going on simultaneously, the data from the entire population was used.

The pre-test can be identified as the data collection from the entire universe of applicants. The experimental process, or intervention, was not the interview itself (style, method or process) but rather the particular results; that being the decision to continue an applicant to Phase II or not. This decision thus created Groups I and II. The post test included the observation and computed analysis of the differences between Group I and II. The testing of the research hypothesis was accomplished when a comparison was made among the demographic like variables discussed previously between Group I and Group II.

The T-test procedure was employed for all variables (age, G.P.A., term standing, credits earned). Because the measurement was concerned with overall academic performance the cumulative grade point average was used. This variable, cumulative G.P.A. was also recoded in order to create four discrete cells to permit the crosstabs procedure as well as to point toward some additional conclusions (see Table 1). The variable term standing was also recoded in order to permit a similar manipulation (see Table 2). The basic research hypothesis states that there exists some significant differences between the population of Group I (the group that was accepted and the population of Group II (those not accepted). Each test was conducted independently, using each of the five residence hall areas. The alpha level employed was .05 and later extended to .10 in order to discuss any or all significant differences between the two groups of each applicants.

Findings and Results

As one can discern from Tables 1-6 there were no measurable significant differences between those students who were continued in the selection process and those who were discontinued. The mandatory acceptance of the null hypothesis was necessary at the .05 and at the .10 level. Tables 1 and 2 clearly reveal there does not exist any particular proportional difference in either the G.P.A. or term standing between the students who were selected and those who were not. Similarly, a corrected chi square and phi value supports a similar conclusion with respect to applicants who were transfer students (see Table 3).

The T-tests that were conducted (Table 4 and 5) further support the acceptance of a hypothesis of "no difference" by indicating no significant differences among the variables investigated. In fact, although slight, the data reveal an inverse relationship in terms of G.P.A. (both term and overall) in one of the residence hall areas. (Table 5). The T-test in one residence hall area (see Table 5) reveals, although still not statistically significant, the strongest difference. Although approaching an alpha of .05, the difference of G.P.A. in Figure 4 is on .25 of a grade point. A difference as slight as this underscores the futility of the .05 alpha level if in fact there was a significant difference at all.

The results, although not supportive of the research hypothesis do point nevertheless in proactive direction. While the inclination develops to throw up our hands in despair there remains some meaningful implications within our descriptive conclusion of "no difference." The task is still one of streamlining a particular R.A. selection process by using available application information. The possibility of reaching this end is still a realistic expectation.

TABLE 1

CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGE

	Below 2.99	3.00 to 2.24	3.25 to 3.50	3.51 and Above	Row Total
Continued	28	26	13	8	75
Row Percent	37.3	34.7	17.3	10.7	60.0
Column Percent	62.2	63.4	61.9	44.4	
Total Percent	22.4	20.8	10.4	6.4	
Not Continued	17	15	8	10	50
Row Percent	34.0	30.0	16.0	20.0	40.0
Column Percent	37.8	36.6	38.1	55.6	
Total Percent	13.6	12.0	6.4	8.0	
Column Total	45	41	21	18	125
	36.0	32.8	16.8	14.4	100.0

Raw Chi Square = 2.13834 with 3 degrees of freedom.

Significance = 0.544

Cramer's V = 0.13079

TABLE 2

TERM STANDING

	Freshmen	Sophmore	Junior	Senior	Row Total
Continued	23	57	21	6	107
Row Percent	21.5	53.3	19.6	5.6	56.3
Column Percent	50.0	64.8	46.7	54.5	
Total Percent	12.1	30.0	11.1	3.2	
Not Continued	23	31	24	5	83
Row Percent	27.7	37.3	28.9	6.0	43.7
Column Percent	50.0	35.2	53.3	45.5	
Total Percent	12.1	16.3	12.6	2.6	
Column Total	46	88	45	11	190
	24.2	46.3	23.7	5.8	100.0

Raw Chi Square = 5.02127 with 3 degrees of freedom

Significance = 0.1702

Cramer's V = 0.16257

TABLE 3

TRANSFER STATUS

	Transfer Student	Not Transfer Student	Row Total
Continued	23	105	128
Row Percent	18.0	82.0	66.3
Column Percent	67.6	66.0	
Total Percent	11.9	54.4	
Not Continued	11	54	65
Row Percent	16.9	83.1	33.7
Column Percent	32.4	34.0	
Total Percent	5.7	28.0	
Column Total	34	159	193
	17.6	82.4	100.0

Corrected Chi Square = 0.00039 with 1 degree of freedom

Significance = 0.9843

Phi = 0.01297

Contingency Coefficient = 0.0.297

TABLE 4

T-TEST - EAST HALLS

GROUP I - CONTINUED
GROUP II - NOT CONTINUED

Variable	Number of Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	Separate Variance Estimate T Value	Degrees of Freedom	2-Tail Prob.
Grade Point Average Term							
Group 1	107	3.2581	0.471	0.046	1.96	160.85	0.052
Group 2	83	3.1094	0.553	0.061			
Number of Credits Earned As Of Fall							
Group 1	107	48.4766	26.892	2.600	-0.29	178.72	0.769
Group 2	83	49.6145	26.139	2.869			
Cumulative Average Overall							
Group 1	107	3.1935	0.382	0.037	0.91	172.95	0.365
Group 2	83	3.1417	0.397	0.044			
Terms Lived In Dorm							
Group 1	107	4.2056	2.235	0.216	0.00	170.02	0.998
Group 2	83	4.2048	2.398	0.263			

TABLE 5

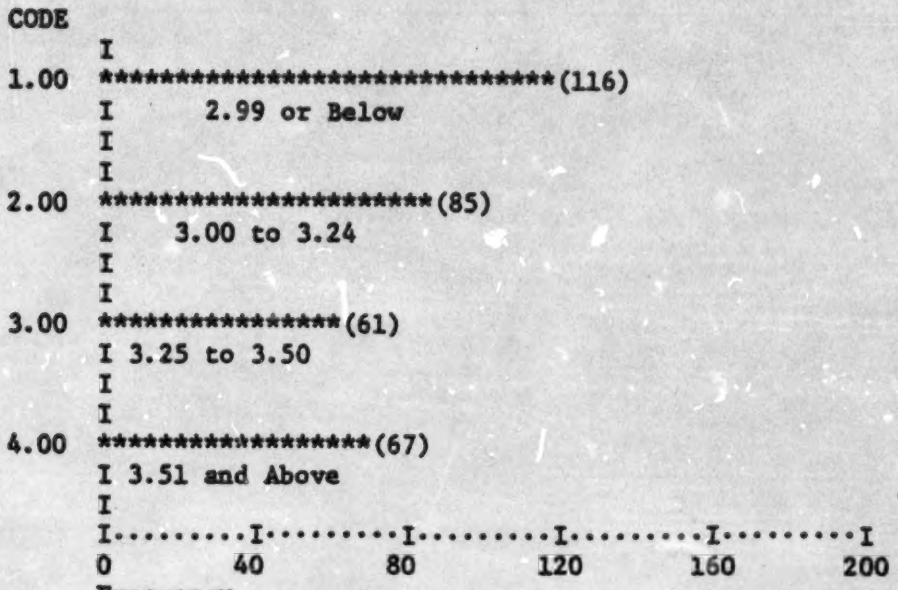
T-TEST - SOUTH HALLS

GROUP I - CONTINUED
GROUP II - NOT CONTINUED

Variable	Number of Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	Separate Variance Estimate T Value	Degrees of Freedom	2-Tail Prob.
Term Standing As Of Fall 1975							
Group 1	75	5.0133	2.528	0.292	0.46	116.91	0.644
Group 2	50	4.8200	2.106	0.298			
Number of Credits Earned As Of Fall							
Group 1	75	43.8400	26.045	3.007	0.07	109.55	0.941
Group 2	50	43.5000	24.481	3.462			
Cumulative Average Overall							
Group 1	75	3.0696	0.364	0.042	-1.31	99.25	0.193
Group 2	50	3.1612	0.395	0.056			

TABLE 6

CUMULATIVE AVERAGE OVERALL (FOR ENTIRE POPULATION)



Conclusion

Of particular concern to those who would desire to make any particular selection process more effective and efficient are some tangible research questions that are generated from the acceptance of the null hypothesis. The problems which exist in personnel intensive work situation where professional time is an expensive luxury, the efficiency and effectiveness of the activities of those individuals must come under closer scrutiny. The following are some descriptive conclusions which might color or at best broach reexamining our a priori expectation given the problem in R.A. selection.

1. Students with grades above 3.0 are not continued in the R.A. selection process with any more frequency than are students with grades below 3.0.
2. There are no significant differences in cumulative grade point average between Group I and Group II for each of the five residence hall areas examined.
3. Proportionally, the students who are accepted to continue in the selection process do not necessarily include more or less transfer students.
4. The students who are selected in the first phase in the interview process cannot be differentiated on the basis of age.
5. There does exist significantly different means in terms of credits earned or term standing to those who are not selected to continue in the process.

With these descriptions in mind, it becomes appropriate to discuss and suggest some prescriptive measure that will be reasonable midst our discovery of "no difference". If the minimum criteria were raised making it more competitive to apply for the R.A. position, the time consuming large applicant pool might be effectively reduced. That is, to suggest to raise for example the G.P.A. requirement from minimum 2.5 to 3.0 or above. Although we do not often find decisions born out of a "lack of difference" it appears that a 3.0 cut off rather than a 2.5 for example is just as justified selection criteria with one exception. While the applicant pool will in fact be reduced, no significant comparable difference in the sample population will be found given the criteria investigated. At this time, the decision to raise selection criteria would be one of educational priority. Later, necessity might demand this type of decision for reasons of fiscal necessity. Professional time might become, if it is not already, too valuable and dysfunctionally costly.

Finally, the traditional methods by which students are evaluated for leadership positions at colleges and universities might be looked at with more scrutiny. A decision should be made to choose either efficiency and effectiveness or the luxurious allocation of human resources. If the selection activities of a Residential Life Program for example are making an efficient use of time, who exactly is selected in a selection process? If this can be anticipated and more important measured, only then can more effective streamlining occur. If it cannot be measured, then how do we know if those activities are the best use of professional time? Certainly, there are numerous other projects and activities which can well occupy the time of a Residential Life Program.

Until then, only administrative directive can change the given personnel procedure for selection in this situation. Are there some qualities that are intrinsic, that cannot be identified or quantified? If so, can a student affairs program afford to rely on these few professional humanistic illusions in this period of fiscal reality? Finally, is there not something to be said for the significance of no significance? Had the comparison of mean scores for example been different enough to reject the null hypothesis for Grade Point Average, (significant at the .05 level), it would have made a difference of a little more the .10 on a 4.0 scale which is to say, little or no difference at all. Utility turns to futility for often answers are much much more available than we are likely to admit.

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